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ABSTRACT

Recent calls for educational reform focus on the need for curricula emphasizing conceptual learning that is integrated across traditional subject areas. In response to this, the major national subject-matter organizations (including the National Council of Teachers of English) met to discuss and develop guidelines for integrating the curriculum from Pre-K-Grade 4, and the result is this position statement. The position statement outlines eight principles that should guide the implementation of an integrated curriculum. It states that an interdisciplinary education which draws from the knowledge and processes of multiple disciplines should encourage students to become active learners equipped with the analytical, interpretive, and evaluative skills needed to solve real-life problems. (NKA)

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National Council of Teachers of English

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Recent calls for educational reform focus on the need for curricula emphasizing conceptual learning that is integrated across traditional subject areas. Responding to this need, the major national subject-matter organizations--the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the National Council of Teachers of English, the International Reading Association, the National Science Teachers Association, the National Council for the Social Studies, the Speech Communication Association, and the Council for Elementary Science International--met to discuss and develop guidelines for integrating the curriculum from Pre-K-Grade 4. A result of their discussions is this position statement, which outlines the principles that should guide the implementation of an integrated curriculum.

Basic to this effort is the belief that educational experiences are more authentic and of greater value to students when the curricula reflect real life, which is multifaceted--rather than being compartmentalized into neat subject-matter packages. Interdisciplinary instruction capitalizes on natural and logical connections that cut across content areas and is organized around questions, themes, problems, or projects rather than along traditional subject-matter boundaries. Such instruction is likely to be responsive to children's curiosity and questions about real life and to result in productive learning and positive attitudes toward school and teachers.

The participating organizations believe that educational experiences should help develop children's natural curiosity and their inclination to construct meaning. A focus on relationships across disciplines should encourage creative problem solving and decision making because it makes available to students the perspectives, knowledge, and data-gathering skills of all the disciplines. Such an instructional process should also encourage children to interact with others in a learning community where diversity of thought and culture is valued.

With the above statements in mind, the participating organizations recommend the following guiding principles:

Interdisciplinary Pre-K-Grade 4 curricula should:

1. Maintain the integrity of content drawn from the disciplines by using meaningful connections to sustain students' inquiry between and among those disciplines. Interdisciplinary instruction should be authentic and worthwhile. It is important for students to develop familiarity with the

knowledge, assumptions, and methods of inquiry used in many subject-matter areas in order to be able to select that which is most appropriate for any given situation. Major concepts and methods from the various disciplines should be taught as part of integrated units and at times that are appropriate to students' interests and cognitive and social development.

2. Foster a learning community in which students and teachers determine together the issues, questions, and strategies for investigation. An appropriate balance should be maintained between student-initiated and teacher-initiated learning experiences.

3. Develop democratic classrooms. Select curricula and organize classrooms that will cultivate a learning community in which students develop both independence as investigators and the ability to collaborate with each other and with teachers to raise questions, investigate issues, and solve problems. Students should be encouraged to assume increasing responsibility for their learning so that they can gain confidence in their abilities to find information, understand and articulate ideas, and make decisions.

4. Provide a variety of opportunities for interaction among diverse learners--for example, discussion, investigation, product development, drama, and telecommunications. Collaborative interaction among students who differ in abilities, perspectives, experiences, ethnicity, and interests promotes learning for all students and fosters positive attitudes towards others and toward learning.

5. Respect diversity of thought and culture. Students should learn by employing a variety of learning strategies, engaging in a wide range of learning experiences, and examining many and varied perspectives.

6. Teach students to use a wide variety of sources, including primary sources, oral communication, direct observation, and experimentation. The use of multiple and diverse sources accommodates various learning styles, interests, and abilities; teaches the importance of cross-checking for accuracy and bias; and develops students' ability to choose the most appropriate and productive sources for investigating specific questions or problems.

7. Use multiple symbol systems as tools to learn and present knowledge. These can include symbols used in language, mathematics, music, and art, as well as those that translate knowledge into tables, charts, and graphs.

8. Use wide-ranging assessments to evaluate both the processes and outcomes of student learning. Ongoing assessment during the inquiry process should lead students and teachers to determine what criteria can be used to identify quality work. Decisions about instruction should be based on a variety of formal and informal assessment strategies that move beyond the exclusive use of objective measures to include observation, portfolios, and performance assessments.

An interdisciplinary education which draws from the knowledge and processes of multiple disciplines should encourage students to become active learners equipped with the analytical, interpretative, and evaluative skills needed to solve real-life problems. Eliminating artificial barriers among subject areas gives students a broader context for solving real-life problems.